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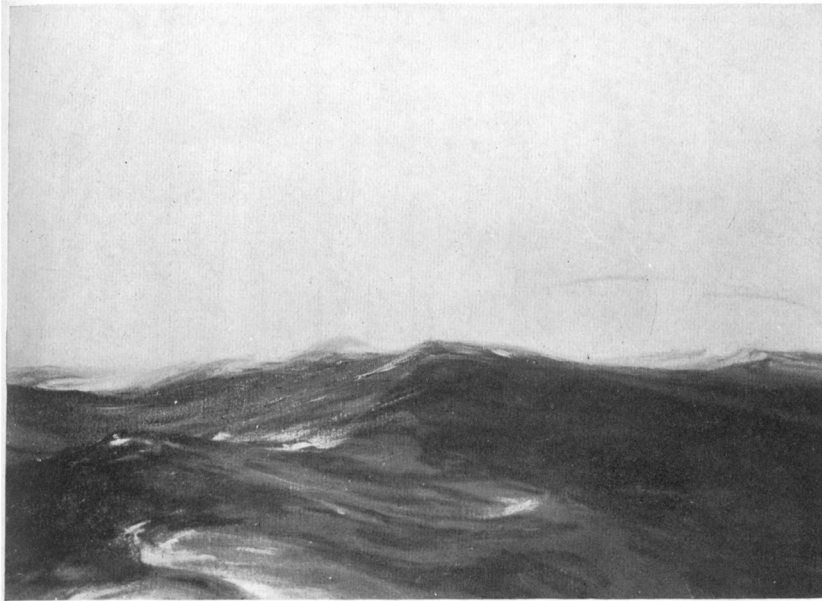
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THE OPEN SEA

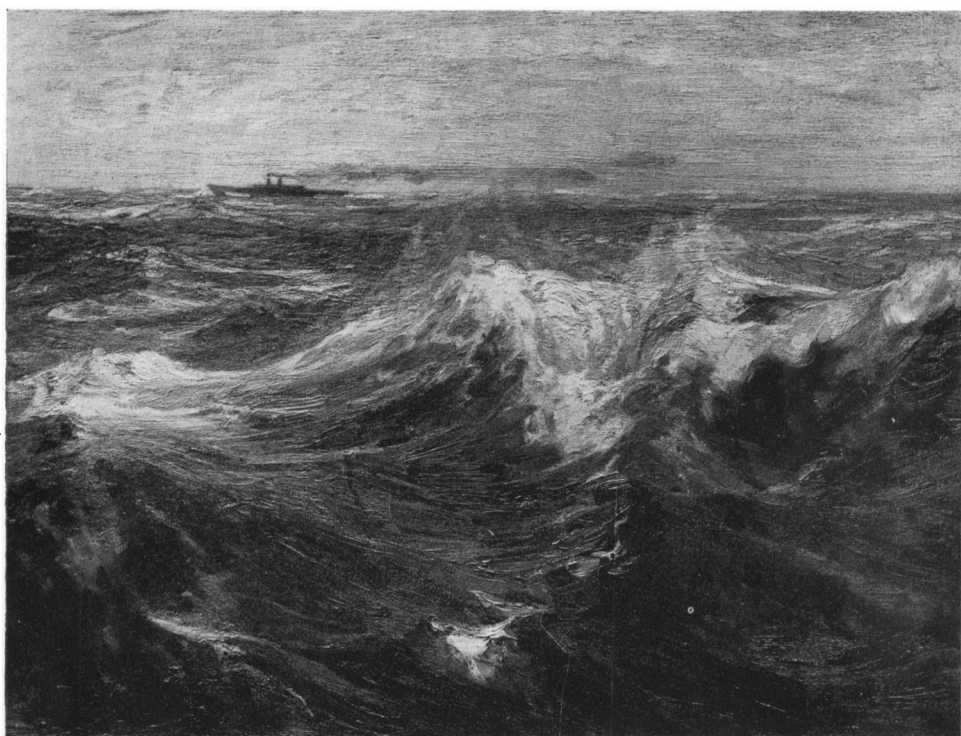
CHARLES H. WOODBURY

THE IDEAS OF A MARINE PAINTER

BY WILLIAM HOWE DOWNES

THE distinctive character of a painter's work in any special line may often be brought out by comparison with the methods, purposes and styles of his predecessors and rivals. Marine painting offers a large variety of different types of work, from the time of Van de Velde down through Turner to the most modern of its manifestations as seen in the pictures of Winslow Homer, Paul Dougherty, and Charles Herbert Woodbury. The old Dutchman's conception of the sea was grandiose and spectacular, but his method of representing it was relatively petty and niggling. It was often but a sleek foreground for a sky picture of heaped-up

clouds, or a background for the impressive display of shipping or a naval combat. As a painter of water, Van de Velde, with all his immense skill, remains somewhat conventional, though his conventions were entirely respectable. Turner, on the other hand, overwhelms and awes the spectator by his tremendous power of realizing the turbulence and sweep of the waves; and if he is the painter of effects, infusing romantic and fanciful spirit in all that he touches, he is persuasive to such a degree that we feel nature ought to look like this, whether it does or not. He seemed to Ruskin an innovator and a bold realist, but his work, placed side by side with



THE STEAMER

CHARLES H. WOODBURY

some of Winslow Homer's sea pieces, would look factitious.

The Americans of our own generation have grappled with the ocean in a scientific, sincere and direct manner, not so much in the vein of picture-makers, but as interpreters of the idea of elemental forces. They have stripped the subject of artificiality, perhaps of picturesqueness; they have eliminated most of the conventions of marine painting; they have invented new methods to meet their purposes; and many of these methods have been the means of throwing new light on the sea, of producing an impression of it that is analogous to an actual revelation of the nature of the thing. Of course, where they have gained so much, they have also lost something.

Charles Herbert Woodbury was born and reared close to the seashore, and he never found his vocation until he began to paint the ocean. Few painters have painted it with a more familiar knowledge of its aspects, a closer sympathy

with its various moods, or in a larger imaginative style.

In his make-up there is a good deal of the scientist's dispassionate adherence to truth for its own sake, allied to the more purely artistic traits, the sensuous perception of beauty in form and color and the passion for its expression in pictorial terms. Rare is the power displayed by Mr. Woodbury of seizing those momentary aspects of the sea when it is most impressive in its action and making it actual. He has applied to this difficult problem of painting a very exceptional talent and intelligence, and has worked it out by a method entirely his own, invented and developed with a perfect adaptation to its purpose. The achievement is of importance, constituting a valuable contribution to the art of our day.

In the beginning of his professional career, in the eighties, Mr. Woodbury had an immense facility, the danger of which he soon realized. He had the



MOUNT MONADNOCK IN WINTER

CHARLES H. WOODBURY

courage and stamina not to allow himself to be carried away by it. He humbled himself, went back to the fundamentals, becoming a student of nature, and turning his back upon a too easy success. For a time, then, his work seemed, and perhaps was, fragmentary. But as his style gradually assumed its approximately complete phase, the manner in which he used his medium became an object lesson in the adaptation of means to end, and in the final form his control of his metier is so instinctive or automatic that it is no longer noticed. The distinction and largeness of his mature style are to be measured by the wonders of nature that it realizes and its significance as an interpretation of nature.

Mr. Woodbury's own philosophy of art may be outlined in some casual remarks which he made to me in his studio years ago, when we chanced to be talking of landscape painting. Landscape art, he said, has been underrated and misunderstood. Its relative importance

needs to be affirmed, and this is to be done by showing the relation between landscape and humanity. The painting of an impression, a view, a portrait of a place somewhere outdoors, has only a temporary interest. The great landscapes, those which live after their authors are gone, and which possess a permanent interest, are generalizations rather than likenesses. They may be said to represent a type of scenery, not any special locality. It is the type, not the individual, which survives. The principal defect in the usual painting of landscape is that we set forth a momentary effect, something that we have seen, a portrait of something, a local and individual reality. This is like mistaking a word for a sentence; it is the material for a picture, but it is not the picture. All the finest thoughts are in the dictionary, to be sure, but it requires somebody with a mind to combine the words so as to say something. In a work of art what we are looking for is the meaning, the



A QUIET SEA

CHARLES H. WOODBURY

thought of the man who made it, and this is just as true of landscape as it is of portraiture or historical painting. In fact, if a landscape amounts to anything, it is an historical work. The same is true of a portrait. All great pictures are historical. They represent the type, not the individual. They are generalizations and not likenesses merely. They are not studies, but the results of study. They are not literal truths, but the larger truths of philosophy, experience and feeling.

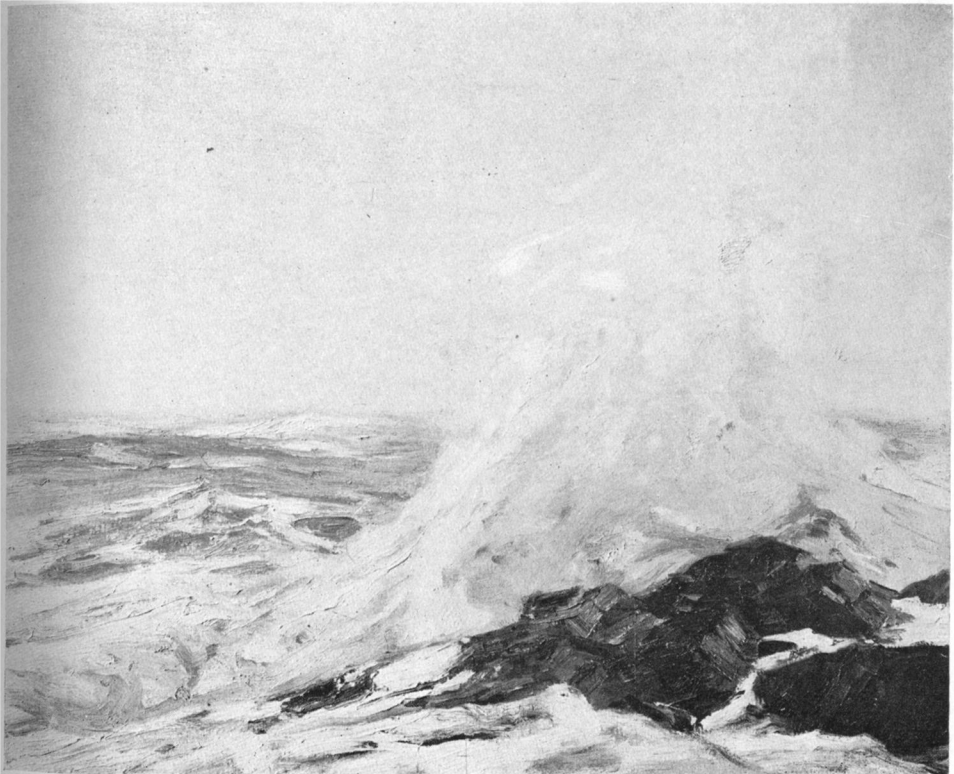
Mr. Woodbury generally begins his talks to his class at Ogunquit by saying that a picture is a thought or feeling expressed in terms of nature. He deems this important because the public usually takes it for granted that a picture is an imitation of nature. Realism, after all, is only what one person thinks the thing is like; no one can say that his view of nature is the only one. One person's view of nature is, to be sure, valuable to him, because it is his, and is therefore

worth while to him; but it cannot be imposed on others. At the same time no one else has very much right to interfere with him. Whatever a painter may be, bright, stupid, or medium, his own personal view of things is the thing for him and for him alone. Thus in his teaching Mr. Woodbury tries to throw the whole question back to the personal efforts of each individual, and to train each pupil to know himself. This is a difficult thing to do, for very few people really know themselves, but it is the one thing to do and to hold on to—one's own personality and the understanding of it. People are apt to be inaccurate in what they see. They mix what they see with what they know; it is almost inevitable. Clear sight is a very big thing. We see one thing, and we think we are seeing another. Expression must be through detail, but it must be through such a chain of detail as to point to a big principle. Out of all the detail of nature only a few items can be strung together

like beads on a string to show the whole movement of things. Trivialities may be so related as to point to a great truth. The child's view of nature is simple, straightforward, clear, but uncultivated. The child knows little detail and sees little of it, so the bigger things stand in a child's consciousness. We should be as children, but through the knowledge of adults. We have got to have much knowledge in order to obliterate our consciousness of the smaller things.

By way of illustrating the naïveté of the child's vision, Mr. Woodbury told his pupils last summer the story of the blue horse. A small boy who was riding with the artist, late in the afternoon, saw in the field, which was in shadow, a white horse, and beyond was a hill in sunlight. And the boy said, "Look at that blue horse." Well, said the artist, that

horse was just as blue as blue could have made it; the boy saw the horse as he was relatively. In other words, the white horse in the shadow was relatively blue to the rest of the landscape. The boy saw the color as it made its true impression on his mind. He did not know that horses rarely came blue. Nor did he know that the horse only seemed blue. If he had been a painter, he would have seen it the same way. But, as much of the public would have seen it, it was simply a white horse. In spite of our knowledge that horses are not blue, we want to know when the horse seems blue. The whole thing is subjective always in our consciousness. We see few objects, they are all translated into something different in our minds, but it matters very little what they actually are, so long as we place them in the proper relations to the whole.



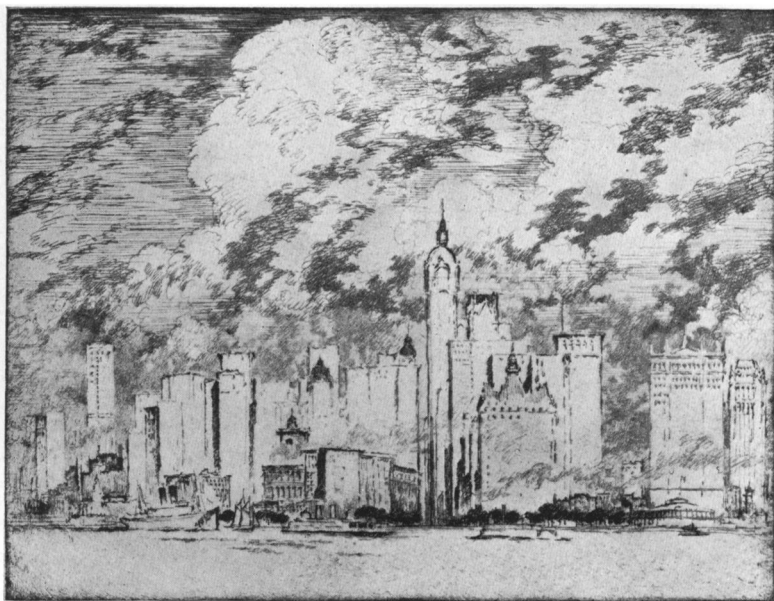
THE BREAKER

CHARLES H. WOODBURY

It is a question of consistency. Preference, choice, is the root of the artistic impulse. Selection is what makes a picture. It must express something rare. All knowledge is relative; a fact is a relative thing; it may become nothing under certain circumstances. Unassociated details have no meaning. He who tries to set down every ripple on the surface of the sea will not only find that one ripple is pretty much the same as another, but in the end he will forget that there is a great big ocean behind those ripples.

From the general tendency of these remarks to students it may be inferred

that Mr. Woodbury deals chiefly with fundamental esthetic principles, rather than technical details, and this inference is quite right. The larger view of a given subject is his constant preoccupation, and he brings this forward in all his criticisms of his pupils' work. Moreover, it is consistently exemplified and illustrated in his own work, which is broad in the truest sense of the term, suggesting rather than describing, interpreting rather than recording, and thus presenting the concrete example of his own definition of a picture—a thought or feeling expressed in terms of nature.



NEW YORK: THE UNBELIEVABLE CITY

JOSEPH PENNELL

COURTESY OF MESSRS. FREDERICK KEPPEL & CO.

JOSEPH PENNELL AND THE WONDER OF WORK

BY FITZROY CARRINGTON

A FEW years ago the writer was asked to supply the rivulet of text which should meander through a volume of reproductions of Mr. Pennell's drawings, etchings and lithographs—a selection, of course, for Mr. Pennell

is artistically irrepressible, and his *oeuvre* of thirty years would fill a number of fair-sized galleries. Obviously, the first thing to do was to consult the artist. His reply was characteristic—"If it is to be done at all I should like